

Who Will Prepare Tomorrow's Quality Teachers?

MARGARET A. MCKENNA

Students returning to pre-K-12 classrooms across New England this fall expected well-kept facilities, up-to-date textbooks and basic supplies. Unfortunately missing from an increasing number of these classrooms is a certified teacher with a mastery of the subject matter being taught and an understanding of how children learn.

Superintendents and principals everywhere are feeling the pressure to find and hire teachers. Attracting qualified educators to certain disciplines—math, science and special education, in particular—has become a critical problem. The teacher shortage is on America's radar screen. But some of the solutions being offered—and the players proposing them—may do more harm than good to our schools and students.

The media has brought home the need over the next decade to train and hire 2.2 million new classroom teachers to replace a retiring workforce and respond to an increase in the school-age population. Where will these new teachers come from and who's going to train them? The answer will have a long-lasting impact on our schools and several generations of students to come. This is an opportunity New England cannot afford to squander.

We talk a good game about how important teaching is. It's the number one issue on every political candidate's lips. We have education presidents, education governors, education mayors. But how have their promises impacted this profession? Teachers are the primary factor influencing what happens in classrooms. Nothing else comes even close—not the amount of money spent per student, not class size, not facilities. The quality of teaching is unequivocally the central factor in student achievement.

If we manage to make the profession more attractive to enough candidates to fill these 2.2 million vacancies, then we're faced with the challenge of educating, orienting and mentoring them in large numbers over a very short period of time. This is a significant challenge exacerbated by constantly changing teacher certification requirements, the introduction of yet-to-be-validated licensure tests and the constant stream of pejorative remarks about teaching and teachers. The answer will require a multitude of approaches from a variety of providers. But some of the solutions being proposed are shortsighted. Putting unqualified, underprepared individuals in a classroom isn't fair to the individuals or the students.

The shortage is so severe that some states, such as

Utah, are recruiting college students in their junior year to become classroom teachers, with little if any formal preparation. In the Los Angeles Public Schools, up to one-third of elementary school classroom teachers have had no formal training. And with school districts scrambling to fill vacancies, not surprisingly, opportunistic entrepreneurs are eyeing new-teacher credentialing as a significant business opportunity.

The new entrants in the teacher preparation field fall into three categories: for-profit, proprietary companies; fast-track programs targeted to career-changers and sponsored by local officials; and packaged online modules. All three enjoy advantages over the traditional route to teacher licensure: schools of education housed in higher education institutions.

Frequently housed in large, balky public institutions, many teacher preparation programs have survived in a quiet corner of

academe for years without major changes. While many of the nation's schools of education have innovated and lifted the craft of teaching teachers to teach, others haven't. Meanwhile, for-profits like Apollo Corp.'s University of Phoenix will outmaneuver most traditional education schools every day of the week when it comes to marketing and "customer support."

However, teaching is both an art and a science and part of learning how to teach is experiencing good teaching. Colleges and universities focus their resources on their faculty, understanding that this is where quality lies. For-profits focus a larger percentage of resources on marketing than on their faculty. This is a cause for concern.

Another group of new entrants in the teacher preparation field is taxpayer-funded. Taking matters into their own hands, states ranging from Massachusetts to Georgia to Michigan and large school districts, including New York and Denver, have created home-grown accelerated certification programs. They often involve some financial inducement. The Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers (MINT) is typical. Dangling \$20,000 "signing bonuses," the program recruits career-changers and recent college graduates with no education training. A major



premise is that the candidates already possess deep subject matter mastery. MINT and programs like it assert that they provide candidates with all the other skills and knowledge teachers need to be effective – pedagogy, classroom management, learning styles theory, understanding of special needs and child development—in a seven-week summer course. While these programs have managed to attract some candidates, the numbers are small and the retention of these newly trained teachers in the profession is very poor. Most of these programs provide minimal follow-up and support for graduates.

The fact that such programs are sponsored by government entities—often the same agency responsible for regulating traditional programs—allows them to operate largely free of criticism from the field. Can such crash-course programs make individuals with no experience fit for the classroom in a tenth of the time education schools spend preparing candidates?

The third category of new entrants is online providers. There are clearly a lot of bets that technology-enabled “distance learning” can be an effective substitute for traditional face-to-face instruction. While providers are only beginning to offer new-teacher certification programs entirely online, a variety of hybrid models, as well as online professional development programs for educators, are available. Most are too new to be judged for quality or results. But surely, the basis of good teacher training is modeling good pedagogy. Translating that to an online

environment has not been a high priority of most providers so far.

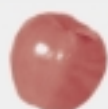
One thing is clear: Today’s teachers must be equipped to handle diverse learning styles, classroom management issues, curriculum planning, assessment and the integration of technology.

Will the new entrants prepare skillful teachers? Will they help to make teaching more attractive, drawing individuals who otherwise would not enter the field? Once in the classroom, will graduates of nontraditional programs stay?

College and university schools of education, meanwhile, need to abandon traditional thinking and initiate innovative approaches to training a new teacher force. They have to create programs that are suitable to the widely varying educational backgrounds and experience that candidates bring. They must be accessible in terms of place and time. And they have to be creative in finding ways to guarantee jobs for teacher candidates. School systems and colleges have to work together to make early commitments to students.

A single teacher’s influence is enormous; the potential effect of 2.2 million new teachers is extraordinary. New England must do everything it can to improve the status and conditions of teaching and to encourage young people to become part of shaping our future generations.

Margaret A. McKenna is president of Lesley University.

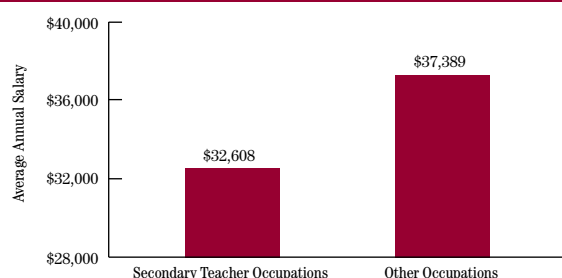


Fed Up

Fully half of all new teachers quit teaching within their first five years to pursue other careers or because they are simply dissatisfied, according to a study by the U.S. Department of Education. Among the reasons, says a new Southern Regional Education Board report, new teachers are often assigned the most difficult students or subjects in which they lack preparation.

In addition, teacher salaries continue to lag behind those of several private-sector occupations.

Secondary school majors who leave the teaching profession for other fields find much higher average salaries ...



Source: Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies.

How much can people with various majors expect to earn over their lifetimes relative to business majors?

Major	Percent Effect
Computer Systems Engineering	31.6%
Chemical Engineering	30.7%
Civil Engineering	10.5%
Physics	9.9%
Chemistry	2.0%

Business Majors

Geology	-0.1%
History	-15.4%
English	-15.4%
Math Education	-19.2%
Special education	-20.0%
Secondary Education	-21.0%
Physical Education	-21.0%
Elementary Education	-23.5%

Source: Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies.